

Manet

Portraying Life

"You would hardly believe how difficult it is to place a figure alone on a canvas, and to concentrate all the interest on this single and universal figure and still keep it living and real."

—Édouard Manet

D epicting the Paris of his day, Édouard Manet (1832–1883) captured the 19th-century urban experience, legitimizing ‘modern life’ as an artistic subject. His detached, frank mode of representation and his subversive handling of paint and subject matter shocked his critics, inspired the Impressionists, and eventually established his reputation as the father of modern painting. Key to this reputation was his engagement with portraiture. *Manet: Portraying Life* explores this significant aspect of his work—specifically the interchange between portraiture and genre painting in his images.

Manet’s portraits tend to fall into two main categories: the “straight portrait” meant to represent the physical and psychological likeness of a specific sitter, and the genre scene of people engaged in contemporary life. These categories, however, are not always easily distinguishable from one another. Manet introduced ambiguity into his genre scenes through his repeated use of identifiable models—often his family, friends, and supporters—and his absolute emphasis on them as real individuals rather than as generalized types. Are we supposed to regard *Mme. Manet at the Piano* as Manet’s wife Suzanne (an accomplished musician), or as an anonymous modern woman of leisure and taste?

Manet: Portraying Life presents portraits that span the length of Manet’s career. The show is arranged in thematic sections: The Artist and His Family; Artists; Pastels; Men of Letters and Figures of the Stage; The Status Portrait; and Models. Manet’s “living and real” figures provide us with a glimpse of middleclass life in the rapidly modernizing Paris of the late 1800s. Their freshness and vitality sparks our curiosity about their identities and their lives—and about what we ultimately may have in common with them.



Édouard Manet

Édouard Manet was born in Paris in 1832 into a comfortable, property-owning middleclass family. His family's economic security allowed him to pursue his interest in art. Manet entered the studio of the successful painter Thomas Couture in 1850, where he studied for six years. In 1861 Manet had his first painting accepted at the Paris Salon (the official annual exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts). Two years later he married Suzanne Leenhoff and accepted her illegitimate son (and possibly his own) Léon Koëlla Leenhoff into his family.

Manet was ambitious and craved public recognition and success; he never doubted the importance of exhibiting at the Paris Salon. Nevertheless, he abandoned the constraints of tradition and convention (qualities usually prized by the Salon jurists), each new work representing a break with all that preceded it. This approach endowed Manet with a position among his younger contemporaries, such as the Impressionists, as the “founding father” of modern art—a label acknowledged by later artists as well, including Matisse and Picasso. Manet died in 1883 at age 51, due to complications from syphilis.



Carolus-Duran (French, 1837–1917), *Portrait of Édouard Manet*. Oil on canvas, 1877. 63.5 x 45.4 cm. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. Purchased with a bequest from Frederick Lippitt

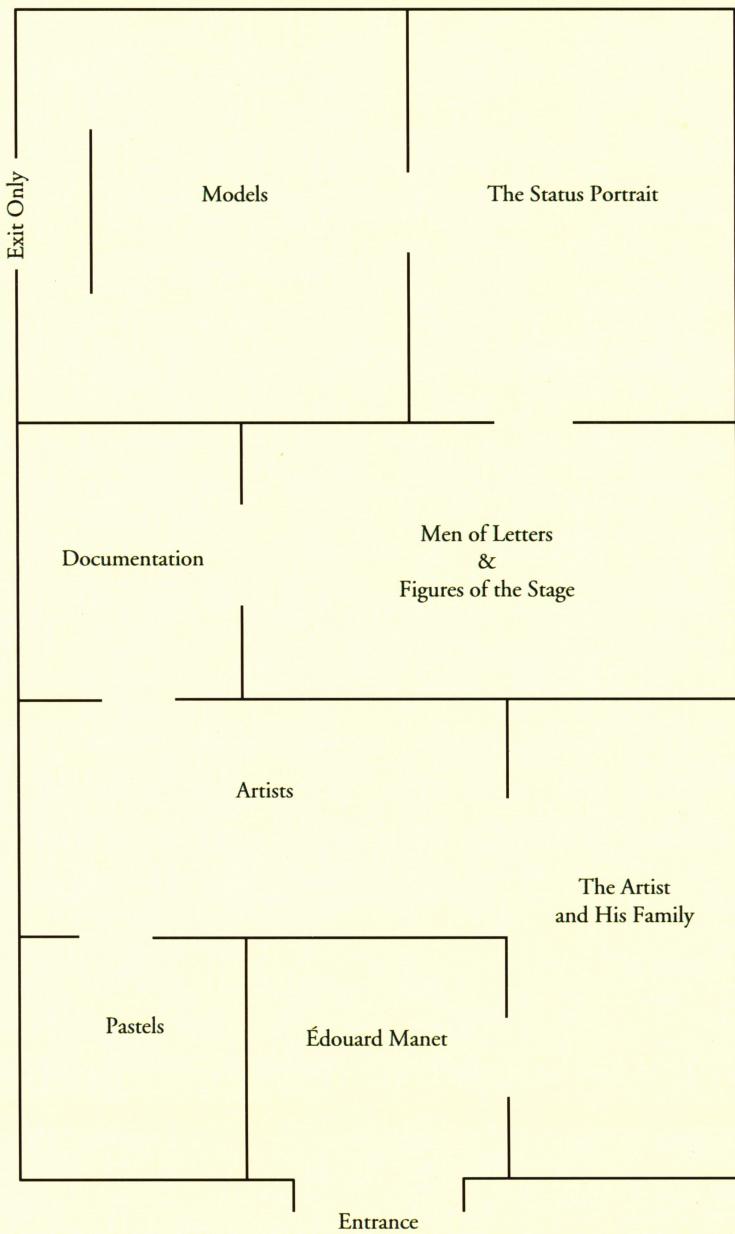
Manet's Paris

The Paris of Manet's time was a city undergoing tremendous changes—political, cultural, even physical. In the span of 40 years France had gone from an Absolute Monarchy to a republic to an empire, back to a monarchy. The February Revolution of 1848 ushered in the Second Republic, to be replaced by the Second Empire that lasted from 1852 to 1870—a crucial period for Manet's development as an artist and for the development of Paris into a modern city. A massive rebuilding and modernizing campaign under the guidance of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891) resulted in the city's now-familiar wide boulevards, new infrastructure, and improvements to parks and monuments (though at the expense of much of Paris's medieval architecture).

Thus transformed, Paris became a cultural beacon, a place for experimentation and innovation. Authors like Gustave Flaubert and Émile Zola wrote about “modern life” in Paris and artists like Manet and the Impressionists likewise depicted in unidealized, unromantic terms this new city of cafés, urban dandies, bourgeois pleasures, and changing mores.

Manet *Portraying Life*

Exhibition Floor Plan



The Artist and His Family

Manet often drafted members of his family—his parents, brothers, wife, and stepson—to serve both as sitters for portraits and as models in his genre paintings. Most often portrayed were his wife Suzanne Leenhoff (1829–1906) and stepson Léon-Édouard Koëlla Leenhoff (1852–1927). Dutch-born Suzanne entered the Manet family circle as piano teacher to Édouard Manet's two younger brothers in about 1849. In 1852 she gave birth to Léon, whose paternity remains uncertain (he was referred to in public as either Édouard Manet's young brother-in-law or godson). Suzanne married Édouard in 1863.

She became the most frequently painted of Manet's subjects. The portraits of Suzanne relate the natural ease between painter and sitter, as well as the resultant blurring of the boundary between portraiture and genre scene. Léon Leenhoff also made frequent appearances in his stepfather's works, sometimes seeming to have stepped out of an Old Master painting, occasionally playing a modern, fashionable young man.

☞ *Mme. Manet at the Piano*. Oil on canvas, 1868. 38 × 46.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
Legs du comte Isaac de Camondo, 1911



Artists

Manet had a wide circle of artist friends. They would gather in his various studios, meet at the Cafés Guerbois and Nouvelle Athènes, and attend the Manets' Tuesday and Thursday soirées. Manet's paintings of artists oscillate between convention and innovation, and even when working in an apparently orthodox manner, he explores ways in which traditions can be undermined. He took three approaches to this category of sitter: the commonly accepted presentation of the artist in his or her studio; the artist as private individual; and the artist as an exemplar of a social type or condition (Joseph Gall as a reader and a smoker; Berthe Morisot as the epitome of repose; Claude Monet and Giuseppe De Nittis as bourgeois family men).

If Manet's portraits of artists recorded friendship and admiration, they also worked towards a wider agenda, like his portraits of family members: the reflection of the contemporary world and its social conditions.

☞ *Eva Gonzalès*. Oil on canvas, 1870. 191.1 × 133.4 cm. The National Gallery, London.
Sir Hugh Lane Bequest, 1917





Pastels

Manet created 89 recorded pastels (others may be lost), 75 of which were portraits. Throughout his career, Manet had utilized the medium occasionally, but as his strength began to wane in the last years of his life, he took up chalk much more frequently. Pastel's ease of execution appealed to the ailing artist since it produced brilliant results without the physical exertion demanded of painting in oil. These pastels also reflect Manet's admiration for the expert manipulation of the medium in 18th-century French art.

With rare exceptions, the dozens of pastels Manet created after his move into his final studio are markedly similar: conventional bust-length views of female sitters. All the women are depicted in the latest fashion and accessories, their hats, gloves, muffs, and dresses reflecting contemporary Parisian femininity. Boldly executed and only flirting with finish, they impressed the critics who had often had trouble with these same qualities in his oil paintings.

 **Mme. Guillemet.** Pastel on canvas mounted on Masonite, 1880.
54.8 x 35.2 cm. St. Louis Art Museum. Funds given by John Merrill Olin

Men of Letters & Figures of the Stage

Manet surrounded himself with distinguished members of the cultural elite, the literary and artistic avant-garde, as well as more humble performers. Novelists, poets, critics, essayists, and leading personalities of the theater traverse his canvases, conjuring up the literary world of mid- and late 19th-century France. They include writers who championed the new artistic programs of Realism, of Impressionism, and of Manet himself, including Théodore Duret, Émile Zola, and George Moore. Many frequented the Tuesday and Thursday soirées at the Manets' home and were regular visitors to Manet's studio.

The portraits Manet made of these writers and performers range from the apparently conventional to the highly enigmatic. Some are surrounded by attributes of their profession and their interests; some perform their famous roles; and some are stripped of conventional attributes and presented as urban dandies.

— *Émile Zola*. Oil on canvas, 1868, 146.5 × 114 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
Donation de Mme Émile Zola, 1918





The Status Portrait

Status portraits require an artist to communicate the social and economic circumstances of the sitter—power, wealth, position, and breeding—in ways immediately recognizable to the viewer. All the portraits in this section, finished and unfinished, appear to aspire to this goal. Pose, props, gestures, and dress all proclaim the sitters' circumstances.

Manet's financial situation ensured that he neither had to seek commissions nor conform to his sitters' expectations. Indeed, Manet received relatively few commissions for status portraits, and those that were executed were not necessarily claimed by the client. The majority of Manet's status portraits were made on his own impulse, motivated by an interest in a specific individual, by friendship and shared values, or by an individual's physical appeal.

 **Portrait of Antonin Proust.** Oil on canvas, 1880. 129.5 × 95.9 cm. Toledo Museum of Art,
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1925.108

Models

Positioned on the margins of society, professional models tended to come from relatively humble backgrounds and their livelihoods were often precarious.

Some went on to have successful careers on the stage; some became romantically involved with the artists for whom they modeled, or even married them (as in the cases of Monet and Renoir).

Although Manet employed professional models throughout his career, such as Victorine Meurent, he also used non-professionals, like the daughter of a bookseller who sat for *The Amazon*. As a parallel strategy he relied on female friends whose beauty and personalities he admired and wished to capture in oil and pastel. Manet's images hover ambiguously between portraiture and genre scene when he uses recognizable personalities such as these in, for example, an allegory of the seasons or the representation of a social type.

 *The Railway*. Oil on canvas, 1873. 93.3 × 111.5 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington. Gift of Horace Havemeyer in memory of his mother, Louise W. Havemeyer, 1956.10.1





 *The Monet Family in their Garden at Argenteuil*. Oil on canvas, 1874. 61 × 99.7 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Joan Whitney Payson, 1975
(1976.201.14)

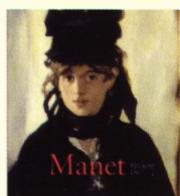
Manet and the Impressionists

“Who is this Monet, whose name sounds just like mine and who takes advantage of my notoriety?” Manet wrote indignantly when his work was confused with the younger Claude Monet’s in 1866. Nevertheless, Manet became friends with Monet (1840–1926) and subsequently was acknowledged as a kind of “spiritual leader” of the group of young artists known as the Impressionists—which, in addition to Monet, included Edgar Degas, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, and Manet’s sister-in-law Berthe Morisot. Manet was never a member of the group and steadfastly refused to participate in their exhibitions, though he championed their art. He also took inspiration from it, sometimes adopting the Impressionists’ free brushwork and light palette.

Manet and the Old Masters

Manet was a serious and dedicated artist, committed to the process of making art. He threw himself into the challenge of finding subjects, compositional formats, and techniques that would provide a new language of art suitable for the representation of modernity. For Manet, this in part entailed extensive study of the Old Masters, notably those of 17th-century Holland and Spain—with special reference to Frans Hals (about 1580–1666) and Diego Velázquez (1599–1660)—and of 18th-century France. “I’ve really come to know Velázquez, and I tell you, he’s the greatest artist there has ever been,” Manet wrote to poet Charles Baudelaire in 1865. Admiration for Goya, Rubens, Rembrandt, Watteau, and Chardin can also be detected in Manet’s work—in his choice of subject matter, his palette and handling of paint, and what he referred to as these artists’ “feeling of truth.”

The text for this guide is adapted from the exhibition catalogue for *Manet: Portraying Life*, written by Maryann Stevens, Stéphane Guégan, Carol M. Armstrong, Leah Lehmbeck, Colin B. Bailey, and Lawrence W. Nichols. © 2012 Royal Academy of Arts, London



Catalogue available in the Museum Store featuring Collector’s Corner and at toledomuseum.org.

Manet's Friends, Colleagues, and Inspirations at the Toledo Museum of Art

Thomas Couture (French, 1815–1879), **Gallery 31, 32**

Eugène Delacroix (French, 1793–1863), **Gallery 31, 33**

Gustave Courbet (French, 1819–1877), **Gallery 33**

Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917), **Gallery 33,**
Director's Conference Room (open to the public)

Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904), **Gallery 33**

Berthe Morisot (French, 1841–1895), **Gallery 33**

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919), **Gallery 33, 35**

Alfred Sisley (French, 1839–1899), **Gallery 33**

James-Jacques-Joseph Tissot (French, 1836–1902), **Gallery 33**



Paul Cézanne (French, 1839–1906), **Gallery 35**

Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926), **Gallery 35**

Attributed to Diego Velázquez (Spanish, 1599–1660), **Gallery 27**

Jean-Siméon Chardin (French, 1699–1779),
Gallery 28B

Frans Hals (Dutch, about 1581–1666), **Gallery 36**
(Great Gallery)



Visit Prints and Authors from the Time of Manet (through January 13, 2013) in the Works on Paper Gallery on the Lower Level.

Top: Berthe Morisot, *In the Garden at Maurecourt* (detail). Oil on canvas, 1884. Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1930.9

Bottom: Frans Hals, *Van Campen Family Portrait in a Landscape*. Oil on canvas, early 1620s. Purchased with funds from the Bequest of Florence Scott Libbey in Memory of her Father, Maurice A. Scott, the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, the Bequest of Jill Ford Murray, and other funds, 2011.80

Programming Highlights

Visit toledomuseum.org for more details

October 11: Masters Series Presentation: *Manet and Spanish Art.*

Gary Tinterow, Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

6 P.M. Little Theater

October 12: *Gervaise* (Film, 1956). 8 P.M. Little Theater

October 19: *Édouard Manet, A Disturbing Strangeness* (Film, 2011).

8 P.M. Little Theater

October 26: *Manet's Paris* (Illustrated talk). University of Toledo

Art History Professor Richard Putney. 7:30 P.M. Little Theater

November 9: *Madame Bovary* (Film, 1949).

8 P.M. Little Theater

November 18: *Portraiture in Song*. Joan Layne (soprano), Kevin

Bylsma (piano), Toledo Opera, Masterworks Chorale. 3 P.M.

Great Gallery

December 14: *Nana* (Film, 1934). 8 P.M. Little Theater

December 16: *Music of Manet's Time*. Erik Johanson (tenor),

Cecilia Johnson (violin). 3 P.M. Great Gallery

Public tours of the exhibition (exhibition ticket required): Most Fridays at 7 P.M. and most Saturdays and Sundays at 2 P.M. Check website for dates.

Exhibition made possible in part by



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 Cover: *The Repose (Portrait of Berthe Morisot)*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 150.2 x 114 cm. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence. Bequest of Mrs. Edith Stuyvesant Vanderbilt Gerry. Photo Erik Gould, by courtesy of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

